113, 563, 575 Southeast Asia ALl

[For information on the origin of the Thien-Ti-Hui Society and the traditional happenings on which the ceremonies are based, see 39: Pickering, ANl Malaya, category 116. --Analyst]

113, 563, 575 Southeast Asia AL1

[For information on the initiation ceremony and meeting house of the Ghee Hin Society in Singapore, see 41: Pickering, AN1 Malaya, Cat. 116. --Analyst]

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Whilst thus simplifying the situation, it must be conceded that the Chinese social organization overseas early revealed serious deficiencies. It was not a complete unit of China transplanted, but fragments from various settings placed together in one spot. Different tribes and classes were put into unwonted juxtaposition, and the criminal and unruly element was disproportionately strong (this last fact needs emphasis). Embryo communal or municipal systems were often taken charge of by the deadly Triad society which used them for its own purposes. At the same time, too rigid a distinction has been drawn between the 'benevolent' *kongsis* and the 'malevolent' *huis*, or secret societies: it seems that the two were not separated in this categorical fashion and in fact were sometimes distinct associations with benevolent functions and Triad societies at one and the same time.[1] The shortcomings of the system became very manifest at certain times, as in Java when Chinese secret societies plotted to seize power from the Dutch, and in the Straits Settlements when these societies under the Triad societies got much out of hand and caused riots and practised intimidation for many years, later extending their activities to Perak where they added to the existing disorder until it approached anarchy.

This, however, is a special aspect of Chinese society in the Nanyang and is by no means typical. By and large, the Chinese were very law-abiding and gave the ruling Powers little trouble. Schlegel was right when he said that the Chinese were 'easy to govern'. Indeed this quality has brought them, at times, into the contempt of rough European individualists who have dismissed this tractableness as the characteristic of 'sheep'.

Students of the Chinese language who have ploughed through the *Tsŭ Erh Chih*, Sir Francis Wade's Documentary Series, will remember a number of memorials in which prefects or intendants

[1] The writer, after extensive experience of secret societies and district and clan organization, is sceptical of many of the theories advanced by observers. Schlegel (as we have seen in the chapters on the Kongsis of Borneo) has definitely regarded the Kongsis as a transplanting of municipal organization necessary to the functioning of Chinese society. Yet they were certainly 'secret societies' under Triad or Heaven and Earth League control. Only when countries, such as Malaya, began to legislate to control these societies was a distinction made between 'good' and 'bad' societies: the former were granted registration; the latter, if they functioned without registration, were illegal and, of course, definitely 'secret societies'. The writer is of opinion that a great deal more research into the matter is called for. (W. L. Blythe, 'The Interplay of Chinese Secret and Political Societies in Malaya', in *Eastern World*, March and April 1950, adds considerably to our knowledge.)

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of circuit of the Manchu dynasty related the details of criminal cases. There was a common offence which did not seem to come under the specific provisions of the penal code but was nevertheless heavily penalized, and it was known as 'being involved'. It appeared that to 'be involved', even quite innocently, in the felonies and misdemeanours of others, was itself in the nature of a crime. Indeed this feeling of the blameworthiness of being mixed up in any offence, tragedy, or lawlessness went right through Chinese society. It was not altogether unusual to hear of a Chinese man or woman hanging him- or herself on the doorpost of someone against whom they had a grievance in order to 'involve' him (there would be a judicial inquiry which would, at least, cause the owner of the door great embarrassment), for 'responsibility' is a far-reaching principle in China. This convention was hostile to the growth of public spirit, for a Chinese who saw a crime being committed, or a person in danger or needing assistance, would very likely do nothing for fear of 'being involved'.

This characteristic has persevered down to the present day, and, coupled with a willingness to pay for a quiet life, has been responsible for many Chinese difficulties. Chinese secret societies were able to parcel out the towns and villages in the Nanyang and to exact 'protection money' from shopkeepers and others without effective protest; in a similar way the Chinese community as a whole was willing to conform to all the laws and regulations made by alien Western Governments (whether to them they made sense or not) in return for being left alone. It was the social wisdom of 'Brer Rabbit, he say nuffin''. It was only when regulations proved to be unbearably vexatious that there was an outburst of hysteria followed by calm. This arrangement, convenient to both sides, was responsible for the saying of Gustaaf Schlegel cited above. It is an irony that this very quality, so convenient to European administrators in the past, as we have seen has brought down so much criticism on the heads of the Chinese *Towkays* in Malaya who, unprotected from reprisals, have paid 'protection' money to the Communist terrorists of their own race.

It seems true to say, then, that at the beginning of the twentieth century the Governments of Southeast Asia were conscious of the Chinese as a 'useful' element in their economic systems, and though they had some unpleasant social peculiarities they in no way constituted a danger or a threat. Chinese labour was introduced

10: Thompson S-4 (no date)1947 ALl Southeast Asia ALl
Chinese
Indians

the indigenous peoples were not sufficiently willing, numerous, or skilled to replace the immigrant laborers. A higher wage scale, they feared, might compel many firms either to go out of business or to install expensive machinery. Already local nationalists, succumbing to the philosophy of economic self-sufficiency, were demanding intensive programs of government-aided industrialization. If such demands were acceded to, the industrialists and labor leaders in the home country could be expected to protest strongly against the new competition.

In this complex situation, the colonial governments of Southeast Asia gradually yielded to the popular demands, although loath to abandon their traditional function as instruments of capitalist planning in the home countries. With the exception, however, of the embryonic and ineffective industrial programs of the Siamese and Burmese governments and the more constructive policy of the Netherlands Indies for a planned industrialization, none of the countries did much in this direction. None was forced as yet to consider very seriously that change in colonial relationship which would result from general economic development in the world and specifically from the new role that China and India would inevitably play before long in Southeast Asia. The Japanese invasion interrupted the efforts of local governments toward a solution of these labor problems. It also injected new elements into the situation.

2

LABOR ORGANIZATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

FOR VARIOUS REASONS an organized labor movement has never developed in Southeast Asia to notable dimensions. In large part this was because of the predominance of alien, transient, and illiterate labor forces, divided—even when of the same nationality—by geographical and linguistic differences. The Indians were further subdivided by caste and religious sect. The Chinese had a far better family, guild, and secret-society organization; but the antagonisms imported as an integral part of these organizations provoked periodic violence. Later the political and gangster elements which operated within their framework impelled all the governments throughout Southeast Asia to control them severely.

National solidarity among the immigrant labor groups was further broken up by the methods of recruitment and management. Agents and foremen exploited their compatriots for their own personal gain, until the governments concerned were gradually and reluctantly forced to intervene. Asiatic agents behaved much as recruiting agents of emi-